

## **Business Essay Contest**

### **Ella**

What do an ice cream and candy shop do with 50 pounds of potatoes, 50 pounds of onions, and a freezer full of meat during a global pandemic? They watch a miracle unfold as vegetables and meat multiply into countless free meals to a community in need, like the *feeding of the 5,000*!

I live in a small border town in Western Wisconsin along the beautiful St. Croix River, called Saint Croix Falls. Here, everyone knows everyone. I love my little community and the closeness and comradery we share. In our tiny town, we have experienced several tragedies and I've witnessed people and business owners come together to help and take care of their own. Whether it was rebuilding after a fire, assisting a family with cystic fibrosis, or helping search for a missing child. So it's not surprising to me that during the spread of covid-19, business owners in my town would once again come together and take something difficult and use it for good.

Interestingly, it was a small candy and ice cream shoppe located in the heart of downtown that kept St. Croix Falls' spirits afloat. Valley Sweets, owned by Shannon and Mike Donaghue offers ice cream, homemade waffle cones along with old-fashioned candy and homemade chocolates. However, it wasn't the sweets that uplifted our community, it was the generous and thoughtful hearts of its business owners.

On St. Patrick's day 2020, restaurants and gyms, schools, and shopping malls all around the metro began to shut down causing anxiety and heartache. Shannon was unsure about the future and what closing meant for her small business in an even smaller town. During the previous winter months, the sweet shoppe started selling lunches to get through the cold winter season where ice cream is not the hot topic. Shannon said, "I had just ordered 50 pounds of

potatoes, 50 pounds of onions, our freezers were full of meat and vegetables, and our pantry was fully stocked. I think we had enough food on hand to feed 150 – 200 people a lunch.” When the news hit that businesses needed to close, the reminder that they had 200 meals about to go bad stuck in her mind until a solution arose. Community members in our small town started to struggle financially with the results of the pandemic; Job layoffs, safer-at-home mandates, hospitals filling up, businesses and schools closing their doors. Depression and fear were spreading quicker than covid! What better way to help the community in this desperate time of need than to give away free meals? That’s exactly what Shannon did. She immediately began working on meal preparations to give out for free. Shannon made them available for anyone, “No questions asked.” she said. People could drive by the shoppe, and some even had their orders delivered. What started out as a couple of hundred meals turned into well over 1,500 delicious homemade dinners! Other small businesses and churches joined the endeavor and began supporting Valley Sweets so they could continue to feed the town. The mentally, physically, and emotionally draining year of 2020 hit Valley Sweets and St. Croix Falls hard. But out of the courage and grace of people coming together and the opportunities to give free meals, this business has earned itself a reputation that is far greater than just good ice cream and candy. Mayor Kirk Anderson had some encouraging words about their business stating “The impact of this was in the sense of community delivered with each meal. While I’m sure it was impactful for the Donahues too, it was even more so to those worried about what the future holds. It was a contagious hope, gratitude, and love shared through a to-go box.” The very foundation of their business is grace, love, and sharing it with everyone. And I believe it is because of that, Valley Sweets is now able to open a second shoppe in St. Paul, with a soft opening on May 1, 2021! What could be sweeter than that?